

to many areas while working for the Social Security Administration. As mayor, he worked to stimulate business and motivate business owners to enhance the downtown high traffic areas and preserve historical Johnstown, providing the town with a better first impression.

Mayor Jackson always had an open-door policy for any constituent who wished to meet with him. His accomplished record and willingness to serve are evident in his over fifty years of public service. On behalf of New York's 21st Congressional District, I am honored to recognize his exceptional leadership and his example as a true public servant and wish him the best of luck in his next chapter.

HONORING THE LIFE AND SERVICE OF EDITH PRAGUE

HON. JOE COURTNEY

OF CONNECTICUT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 23, 2021

Mr. COURTNEY. Madam Speaker, I rise to honor the life and legacy of an eastern Connecticut legend, and my friend, Edith Prague.

Edith's life was marked by service to others, as teacher, a social worker, a state legislator, a state commissioner. I met Edith in our days working together in the Connecticut General Assembly, where she served first a State Representative from 1982 to 1990 and then a State Senator from 1995 to 2013, and her example and guidance on how to conduct yourself as a public official influenced so many new legislators, myself included. She was a fierce and tenacious legislator—never one to back down from a tough debate or miss a chance to advocate for those she served.

Edith was especially passionate about her work for seniors—from lowering drug costs, to expanding access to long-term care and home-based care. In 1987 the State of Connecticut permanently established the "CONNPACE" program which was one of the few public programs that provided direct help to seniors for prescription drugs. That program was a prototype for the federal Medicare Part D prescription drug program enacted by Congress two decades later. I remember well as a new state representative from Vernon, Connecticut watching Edith's inspirational passionate speeches on the floor of the general assembly the day CONNPACE was enacted. That passion led to her confirmation to serve as the first ever head of the CT Department of Aging, another Prague initiative, which gave her an even bigger platform to advocate for the needs and priorities of those in need in the later stages of life.

That was always a hallmark of Edith's service—looking out for others and fighting on behalf of those who needed a champion. Edith called herself "a social worker with power," and she worked every day to use her platform to make a difference in the lives of those she served and crossed paths with over her lifetime. The proof of that is in the countless people across eastern Connecticut who can say that Edith helped them in ways big and small.

Above all, though, family was the most important part of Edith's life. Being a mother and grandmother was always top priority for Edith, and I know daughters Shelley, Benay and Joanne and grandchildren Nathan, Matthew, Sam, Josh, Chris, Brian, Katie, Tim and Mi-

chael, will remember her love and passion for her and for others in need.

I will always be grateful to call Edith my colleague and my friend. She was truly one of a kind, a wonderful person we just won't see replicated. Our region, our state and our country are better for her lifetime of service and dedication to others.

I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring Edith's life and legacy as eastern Connecticut mourns her passing.

BRINGING JUSTICE TO SOLDIERS

HON. ADRIANO ESPAILLAT

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 23, 2021

Mr. ESPAILLAT. Madam Speaker, passage of this year's National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) serves as an act of reprove—and justice—for every sexual assault survivor who has put their life on the line in the name of service for this country and has been left behind in the wake of injustice.

The NDAA contains the revised I am Vanessa Guillen Act. For the first time, the NDAA establishes the Office of the Special Trial Counsel which empowers and requires independent investigators to investigate allegations. That means for the first time, the NDAA takes the authority to prosecute sexual assault and harassment away from the military and gives it to independent military prosecutors.

The military justice reforms included in this annual defense policy bill are historic and the most transformative in our nation's history. It is the culmination of years of advocacy from military sexual assault survivors, their families, and supporters.

But let me be clear: my position on our nation's bloated defense budget remains unchanged.

I remain committed to working with my colleagues to address climate change, racial injustice, and guaranteeing that families across the nation receive the relief they need as we work to build back better from a global pandemic. These are all problems that no amount of military spending can remedy, and we must redirect federal resources to the people, to our future generations, and to our working-class Americans.

While I have historically voted "no" and plan to continue to do so—this was once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to finally right generations of injustice against our nation's servicemembers in uniform, to finally bring some sense of justice to the family of Vanessa Guillen and countless other soldiers who are victims of assault. I refused to leave them behind once more.

With the passage of this year's NDAA, survivors of sexual assault will finally be guaranteed an independent military attorney to decide whether to prosecute and make other key, binding decisions in these cases—also ensuring that domestic violence, stalking, murder, manslaughter, kidnapping, and other special victim offenses are taken out of the chain of command. We are one step closer to justice and protection for our soldiers.

My constituents can rest assured that I will continue my work to rein in defense spending and to invest resources in programs that pro-

mote peace, protect our planet, and provide the American people opportunities here at home.

RECOGNIZING MR. DAVID BALLENGER

HON. MARK TAKANO

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 23, 2021

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize and congratulate a dedicated professional with the Department of Veterans Affairs on the occasion of his retirement. Mr. David Ballenger is an exemplary public servant who has demonstrated the highest standards of professionalism serving our nation's veterans. He has served with the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs at the Department of Veterans Affairs for more than 17 years. His career in public service is a testament to the importance of selfless service.

For the last 10 years, Mr. Ballenger served as the Director of the Legislative Team in the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs at VA. He has been involved in a remarkable breadth of important matters spanning VA's health benefits, memorial functions, human resources, information technology, and real property. In this capacity, he has been the conduit between Congress and VA, providing technical assistance on multiple pieces of landmark legislation including the VA MIS-SION Act, the Forever GI Bill, the VA Disability Appeals Modernization Act, the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act, the Veterans' COMPACT Act, and the Deborah Sampson Act. He also spearheaded the Department's legislative proposal submissions.

As Mr. Ballenger embarks on a new chapter in life, it is my hope that he will recall, with a deep sense of pride and accomplishment, the outstanding contributions he has made to the Department of Veterans Affairs, Congress, and veterans of the United States. May his life be filled with health and happiness.

CELEBRATING THE GENEROSITY OF MR. RALPH ROTELLA

HON. JOHN KATKO

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 23, 2021

Mr. KATKO. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor the generosity of Ralph Rotella, owner of Discount Shoe Repair in Syracuse and driving force behind Ralph's Rescue Mission Shoe Drive.

In 2010, Ralph Rotella was inspired to start Ralph's Rescue Mission Shoe Drive after seeing a homeless person outside of his shop, walking in the cold with their toe sticking out. He made the decision to provide that person with a pair of usable shoes. From that day, Ralph began annually collecting, repairing, and donating shoes to the Syracuse Rescue Mission to help more people in need.

In Ralph's first year of operating the Shoe Drive, he donated less than 100 pairs of shoes. Each year since then, he has steadily expanded his operation, and in 2020, donated 23,187 pairs of shoes—one of the largest donations the Rescue Mission has ever received.